

MACAULAY'S USE OF LITERATURE

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trusted/ the Earl of Shrewsbury ^s had stood
high, too
high, in her favour/ Again, the only
reference is The
Female Nine.¹ The poem in question is a
Jacobite libel on
the wives of nine Whig statesmen—one of
those Jacobite
lampoons, which, as Macaulay says, ' in
virulence and
malignity, far exceed anything that our age
has produced/²
As evidence it is worthless : the character of
the rest of
the poem shows that. But since the poem
exists only in
manuscript, and Macaulay does not say where
the manu-
script is, the sceptical reader cannot examine
the evidence.³
If Macaulay sometimes used material of
very dub-
ious value without adequate care, it would
be unfair
to assume that he habitually neglected to
discriminate
between his literary authorities. No historian
more con-
stantly employed the great writers of a period
to explain its
history. His treatment of Dryden shows this.
Whenever
he can he connects the events of the time
with incidents
in the life of Dryden, so that literature and
politics are
interwoven in the fabric of the History. It is
from the
career of Dryden that he illustrates the
condition of polite
literature and the status of men of letters in
the days of
Charles II.⁴ When he recounts the numerous
conversions
to Catholicism which took place in 1687

Dryden's conversion fills the largest space in the list, and it gives occasion for several pages upon him.⁵ In chronicling the ministerial changes which followed the accession of William III Dryden's dismissal from the laureateship is brought in, and leads to another, though shorter, digres-

¹iv, 1819 (xv). ³III, 1358 (xi).

³ Mr. Paget searched for this poem but was unable to find it. New Examen, p. 10, I discovered it by chance in a volume of miscellaneous Jacobite verse once the property of Sir Robert Strange, and now in the possession of Mr. Charles J. Ffoulkes.

*I, 392-4 (iii)-

&n> ⁸50-3 (vii).